

JACK AND LINDA'S ROAD TRIP

by Matt Pierard, copyright 2019



Sketch from Linda Miller's notebook of herself and Jack, April 2019.

"Linda, stop. You're getting...disgusting," Jack whispered.

"Oh! Well, thank *you* baby!" returned Linda, swigging a beer.

Before her lay a pile of boiled shrimp tails. They were at an all-you-can-eat event in Baton Rouge. When she belched long and loudly, he got up and left the table. Linda looked after her husband for a moment, ignoring the other diners who were looking at her then resuming their consumption. The air was heady with well-cooked crustaceans, special spices, beer, and medicinal herbage. She got up slightly red-faced and looked for him in the crowd. Linda had never thought she'd be the kind of woman to follow her man, that it was -his- duty to follow her lead even in petty arguments like these. But Jack, who'd served in the Marines on two tours of Iraq early in the war, was not a man to follow anyone outside of patriotic duty. She found him leaning on the barrier wall before the river.

"If you had an ass, I'd take you over my knee," he said softly after she sauntered up to him.

"Flirt," she said, nuzzling his shoulder from behind. "I have a perfectly *toned* ass and you know it."

He growled and turned around to face her, pushing his strong hands through her abundant auburn hair. When he hesitated, she blew in his face.

"I popped a couple of Win-to-greens before I came up here."

When he laid one on her, there was light applause, ahhs, and at least one wolf-whistle.

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On the ride back to the motel, he asked, " Why do you do stuff like that?"

"A girl doesn't turn 35 every day," she mock-pouted.

"What: pig-out in public?"

"Well... yeah," she shrugged. "When I was a kid, birthdays were formal affairs. I had to wear a nice new dress and Mom brought out the best china and made her special coconut cake."

"I thought you were allergic to coconut?"

"It just sort of... developed," she said. "Look, I don't want to talk about it."

She leaned forward and searched the digital dial until she found a classic country station, her fav.

"Oooh ooh, *George Jones!*" She turned it up.

Jack, whose tastes ran to Metallica and Nine Inch Nails, rolled his eyes. He'd gotten his fill of country in Iraq, where his platoon was made up largely of younger grunts from Kentucky and West Virginia. Although he was their team leader, they practically shunned him when he stood up for the Dixie Chicks on freedom of speech issues. His loyalty to the president was largely ceremonial, privately considering him a pathetic puppet of a man who didn't hold a candle to his war-hero father. His thoughts on Cheney were more blatant and probably why he left the service -- or it left him, denying him promotions he felt he'd earned. Although his discharge was honorable, he rarely kept ties with his company. Appropriately, he met Linda at an antifa event they were both covering, he as a photojournalist for Mother Jones, she as blogger for an online women's magazine. That was five years ago; they'd been married less than a year.

At the motel, after she'd taken an uncharacteristic bubble bath, Linda briefly put her bare rump on prominent display. "As a pancake," he thought wryly but said nil. As a further enticement, she wore only a black camisole as she slipped her athletic figure into bed. Jack took a quick shower and joined her.

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The next morning, they were on the road heading to Texas. There was to be a large gathering of Z-Ibid enthusiasts in Midland. Rumor had it the Prez was to be appearing, a tailor-made audience for one of his monthly ego-trips. The community fairground was rented yearly by a variety of large-crowd events: monster trucks, gun shows, music festivals, and religious revival meetings. This week was given over to Z-Ibid, a mish-mash of alt-right conspiracy theorists, UFO believers, birthers, hawkers of arcane pharma, nationalist leaders, and various political and social gadflies eager to stir up the pot for online subscribers and subsequent ad revenue.

Linda was set to interview Dominic Mitchell, one of the latter "citizen journalists" who organized the event. Z-Ibid, named for repeated sourcing of misinformation, was Mitchell's cynical invention. Despite the inherent racism of the community, few cared that he was of mixed-race heritage. He had played minor league baseball and was less a draw for his athletic skill than for his flamboyancy and way of filling out his uniform. Most of his fans were women and gays, and being openly bisexual, he never had to go without. His current companion was a dark skinned FTM with a shaved head, a double mastectomy reshaped into faux pecs, and a custom crotch bulge sewn into all of his pants.

Linda likened this person to the Nazi general's servant in Pynchon's "V", and didn't fail to mention it to Mitchell. Like her idol, JK Rowling, she didn't consider MTFs women any more than she considered this character a man. "But for me," Mitchell chuckled lewdly, "Louie is the best of both

worlds -- a dude with a snatch."

Linda's fingers assumed claws after this comment but she continued.

"I did a nude series on an FTM in college," Jack related to Linda later that evening. "She had a big one and I casually mentioned that most guys wished they had one that size. She said, 'Really? Well they can *have* mine!'"

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Linda interviewed other, less sophisticated characters at the fair. One woman likened the president -- whose appearance turned out to be a taped monologue thrown up on a big screen to introduce a rather effete-sounding Slavic racist who bounded up to the stage, slipped on something and almost fell on the source of his ideology -- to the second coming of Christ.

"Oh, I've been called a blasphemer. I've been *excommunicated* by my church, but I sincerely believe the Lord Almighty sent Mr. Donald down to us as a gift from Heaven!"

The woman, a plump, 40-ish blonde with big hair, was concurrently selling sealed plastic vials of His Holiness's sweat, collected from a towel she'd obtained from "one of his representatives on Earth."

Linda next interviewed a young man who took one look at her and whispered '*Valkyrie!*' Linda rolled her eyes at the reference, which involved a graphic novel based on her writings about alien abductions in the neo-Nazi community. What she had intended to be very black satire had bolloxed into some sort of truth to these ill-informed putzes. The youth -- in amateurishly-made SS uniform and knee-length boots meant more for fox-hunting than Jew-chasing -- appeared equally ignorant about Miller's own ethnic roots, even after she admitted as such.

"But you're a *red-head*, and you got a *little nose!*" he almost wailed.

Although Linda could have easily taken this guy, she thanked God Jack was with her. He was an imposing figure, six feet of solid muscle and a butch blond haircut like Kurt Russell in one of his B-movie adventures.

"Are *you* a *Jew* too?" the punk continued.

"No, but I am Polish. Wanna see my sausage?" Jack began to yank down his fly in emphasis.

The moron's eyes widened at that, scurrying off in horror.

"My hero," Linda looked up at him, batting her eyelashes.

The grounds had a row of booths normally used for games of skill and fried eatables. Some of the food vendors at this event specialized in themed sweets, putting their artistic gifts on full display. Jack took a series of photos of Linda sampling said 'delicacies', including a realistic gun cookie, a gummi noose -- the hawkers enthusiastically showing it off with a cookie in the shape of Obama's head inside, which Linda only held out to the camera -- and what Jack referred to as a 'schlong-dog'. Linda balked at any image of her putting it into her mouth.

"Who do you think I am -- *Michelle Bachman*?" she snarled. He did show her eating it very ladylike with a knife and fork.

"I think we have enough here," she said on the trip back to the motel.

"Doesn't this get old for you?" he asked tentatively. It was a sore subject between them. He would have preferred she write about something more conventional, straight politics or womens' issues, but Linda liked being unconventional -- even at her age.

"No. We've had this conversation before, Jack. Somebody has to expose these idiots before they get out of hand."

"Aren't they pretty well exposed already? Jones hectoring that Florida senator in the hallway of the Capitol, der Fuhrer's daily tweet vomit, Morning Joe?"

"Gahhhh, don't mention that hydrocephalic flip-flop so soon after I've eaten!"

She reached for her musical crutch but he beat her to it, sliding a USB of metal into the slot. Something nihilistic by Nirvana surged from the quad speakers. Reluctantly, she found herself bobbing her head to the beat. Once inside their room, they made love feverishly, clothes flying.

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Dominic Mitchell Interview, by Linda Miller, April 16, 2019

Lucretia - The Online Feminist's Magazine

[We sit in the air-cooled camper Mitchell shares with his current companion, Louie Dunn. Mitchell -- tall and light-skinned, with cropped honey-colored curls, hazel eyes, and a swimmer's build packed into jeans and a gray t-shirt -- lives up to his reputation as an eye-catcher. He's well-educated, erudite, and occasionally intense. A dusty, cranberry-red Persian rug runner lies next to the dining booth, which has custom burgundy leather upholstery and a green marble tabletop. Dunn sits just outside under the camper's awning sipping iced tea and chatting with my husband, Jack, who has just taken a few shots of the two of us inside.]

LM: So, tell me about your childhood. You're originally from Baltimore, correct?

DM: Annapolis, actually. My father was a Navy man, my mother is German. [*He shows a gilt-framed photo of them, his father in Naval uniform, his blonde mother in a pale green suit*] She was working at the American Embassy as a secretary when they met, in the mid-70's. I understand her father was horrified when they announced their intent to marry.

LM: Nazi Youth?

DM: Probably. [*shrugs*] It's not like German boys had a choice back then.

LM: Prophetic, wouldn't you say?

DM: I'm =not= a Nazi. Moderate conservative, yes. [*Dunn knocks, enters camper with a couple of bottles of the tea for us both.*] Thanks, babe.

LM: Yes, thank you.

LD: No problemo. [*he leaves*]

LM: Moderate?

DM: [*Nodding towards the door*] I'm in a relationship with a black trans-gay man. I would say so, yes.

LM: You oppose abortion on demand; support the current administration's policies on immigration; believe that women do not belong in politics; publicly stated Russian interference is a hoax; have called the recent Savannah high school massacre an antifa stunt...

DM: [*glibly*] Well, if you want to quibble.

LM: [*I take a couple of gulps of the cold tea to steel myself; he smirks*] Dom, please!

DM: Look, as to abortion, I'm all about prevention. Why do you women let your men fuck without wearing a condom? I always wear one every time with Louie -- he loves it up his ass -- why can't hetero dudes do the same thing? Don't give me excuses like 'it kills the mood'. Scraping tiny, bloody body parts out of a uterus is a mood-killer. Get that image in his mind before he goes in deep, he should get the message -- if he has any sense of morals and ethics. I really find it ironic that you feminists weep and whine over images of Central American infants and toddlers in holding cells, but have zero empathy for a human being only a year or so younger!

LM: I'd hardly call fetal tissue--

DM: It's a *baby*! A human *child*! Here's a for instance: when a woman is so desperate for a kid of her own that she kidnaps a pregnant woman and cuts into her womb to extract that near full-term person, do you call it fetal tissue or a baby?

LM: If it lives, a baby.

DM: [*jumps up, slams fist down on table; Dunn enters shortly, followed by my husband. I turn around and signal him I'm okay, he backs off slowly. Dunn rubs Mitchell's shoulders and whispers something to him. He sits down again; Dunn leaves.*] Next question. [*he's still pissed but subdued*]

LM: Kids in cages don't bother you?

DM. Dirtbag parents using them as pawns, wriggling live bait at the border to curry favor with guards after dragging them across the Mexican desert? These people should be arrested for child abuse and their kids farmed out to any relatives within the States, or escorted back home to their grands.

LM: Isn't that a little Solomonic, or simply Draconian?

DM: Better that than wrapped up in mylar and sleeping on cold concrete floors. What kind of Christian parent does that to their children? Vile, coldly-calculating grifters the lot of them. That bastard who swam across the Rio Grande with his little boy, even after his wife begged him not to do it. They drown, someone takes a picture, it goes viral and the pearl-clutchers blame the *President* -- not the asshole who willfully committed the deed in the first place!

LM: Desperate times lead to desperate mea---

DM: Oh *bullshit*! [*he stands again*] Look, I gotta make a speech tonight and need to get some Z's. [*he calls out*] Louie, you can come in now.

LD: Yes, boss? [*it appears to be a private joke with them; Dunn hands him a granola bar and Mitchell kisses him on the cheek. I get up and begin to leave.*]

LM: Jack wants another shot if that's okay?

I stand on the ground; Mitchell remains in the doorway of the camper, Dunn peeping over his shoulder. We skipped the speech, watching it later online. In performance -- for that's what it is essentially, like a con-man evangelist exhorting the masses -- he's alert, mercurial, his virile appeal self-evident. I cringe a little as he name-checks me -- "The Jewess Linda Miller just interviewed me today, mocked my Aryan heritage then went off with her big, blond husband. And

they call -me- a hypocrite! I say: gas 'em all..." -- but realize that inside, he's just a delayed-adolescent teen preaching to the choir at a lunchroom table to his fellow misfits. Onstage, he mocks the viral video of an anguished father of a Savannah High student, gunned down at fifteen. "What kind of Christian rejects thoughts and prayers anyhow?"

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Linda stood on a field of dry grass and rocks. She wore one of Jack's flannel shirts -- it was cool up in the hill country of New Mexico -- tucked into her black jeans. The lightest fall of rain dappled her face and hands, and the deep red of her wavy hair. Jack hovered around her, taking pictures of the ground and the row of mountains in the distance. As he casually swung his digital cam her way, Linda said, "Don't."

Even with her eyes closed, she was aware of everything. It had been a rough last few days. After the article had run online, the neo-Nazi they had humiliated had flipped out and attacked a group of worshippers in a Houston synagogue with pepper spray and smoke bombs. Already on an FBI watch list, he was thankfully unable to buy serious weaponry. A few of the worshippers had gotten hold of Linda's email and sent her angry messages. One woman had been preparing for her wedding, which was to be held a week later. Linda had lost count of the times she had to say 'I'm sorry.' for inspiring that incident.

"If you're done communing with nature, I'd like to get something to eat," Jack said wryly. "That beanery we passed on our way up here; I counted five semis in the parking lot. Must be good vittles there."

Linda opened her eyes long enough to roll them at his folksy slang. Sighing, she got into the car beside him and sulked the rest of the way.

The chili was greasy but the waitresses all had impressive racks. They bantered lustily with the drivers Flo-style.

"So much for trucker taste," Linda said as they pulled out of the lot, popping a couple of antacids in her mouth.

Jack chuckled and belched with exquisite timing. When he caught her eye, his brows bobbing suggestively, she warned, "Jack Piechowiak, *don't you dare...*"

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As she stumbled out of the car into the motel lot, Linda could still smell it in her hair.

"Je-sus... Dutch oven!!"

She unlocked the room door and headed directly for the bathroom to strip and shower the stink off of her. Jack knew enough not to join her, only kicked off his boots and lay upon the bed with a self-satisfied grin on his face. He was tired and dozed off watching headlines.

Waking suddenly, he sensed something lying on his forehead like a moist washcloth. Reaching up and pulling it off, he realized it was a tampon recently well-used and freaked. Linda sat up in bed beside him, blithely buffing her nails. She had had this stunt pulled on her often enough at summer camp and took his reaction in stride, smiling serenely at his "Oh *god-dammit!*" from the john, then snickered as he brought back the empty packets of ketchup and hot sauce she'd swiped from the restaurant's counter while he gave her the hairy eyeball.

"Okay, you win this round," he said.

They left early the next morning in order to reach their home in San Diego before midnight. Linda missed her cat, Monster, an orange tabby rescue with a notoriously cranky disposition. Linda had a habit of holding the animal in her arms upside down, like an infant, scratch its well-fed belly and coo to it because she had read somewhere that they like it. Jack usually sat there in his recliner poker-faced as the two cuddled on the couch.

They stopped in Reno for lunch at a chain restaurant this time, Linda pointedly sitting in the non-smoking section. Cigarette smoke usually didn't bother her -- part of the job was putting up with a variety of unsafe conditions, just to get a good interview. When Jack asked her about it, halfway through their chicken and mashed potatoes, she lay her hand on his across the table and smiled demurely.

"I'm pregnant, Jack."

He sat back, stunned for a moment, then leaned over and kissed her on the mouth. His eyes were a little moist when he sat back down. She continued caressing the back of his hand.

"I thought at first I wouldn't say anything," she confessed, "But after Mitchell, I -- I felt I had to accept it."

Jack frowned. "You were considering termination?"

"I don't know, possibly, the way the world is today. But that guy, that sick bastard, exhorting his crowd to violence against my people, just for existing... I feel I need to fight back like, I dunno, Sarah Conner. Hope my son, or daughter keeps up the -- *oh!*"

She started to cry, hormones kicking in. Jack got up, pulled an empty chair from a neighboring

table over and sat close to her, holding her.

"Is everything all right, sir?" a passing waitress asked with genuine concern.

"We're having a baby," he said, distractedly.

"What - *here*?!" she said, amazed.

"Not for another nine months. Could you bring us a glass of cold water, please?"

"Certainly, sir, and *congratulations*!"

"*God*," Linda said, regaining some composure, "I can't believe I'm having a crying jag in a *Cracker Barrel*!"

The waitress brought over the water. Linda drank some, leaned back and sighed. Jack remained beside her, holding her hand.

"Let's get out of here," he said. They went to the register to pay, but the cashier waved them away. "On the house," she smiled. Thirty years in the business, she had second-sight on real over fake.

Back on the road again, they determinedly stayed the course. They both hated to wallow in sentimentality. Home was reached sometime after 11:30 PM. Having phoned ahead, their cat-sitter, Madeleine, was waiting with Monster in his carrier. They stepped inside the small, 1940's-era house on the outskirts of town and breathed a sigh of relief. Monster jumped up on Linda's shoulders and purred loudly. Husband and wife sat on the sofa together and cuddled. A moment later, the cat leapt to the floor and hid under a table. The earth moved like a small ocean wave, perhaps a 1.5 tremor.

"I seem to have that effect on nature," Linda said, nonchalantly.

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